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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MUMBAI 000291

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SUBJECT: NAXALITES KILL OVER THIRTY POLICEMEN IN WESTERN CHHATTISGARH

REF: A. NEW DELHI 1359

1B. KOLKATA 162

1C. KOLKATA 164

1D. 08 KOLKATA 148

11. (U) Summary: On July 12, at least thirty state security personnel were killed by suspected Maoist rebels in the central Indian state of Chhattisgarh. The attacks, amongst the worst to hit the insurgent-ridden state in years, occurred in three stages over the course of the day in the rural Manpur-Mohalla district, ninety kilometers west of the capital Raipur, and just across the eastern border of neighboring Maharashtra. Included in the causalities was the district Superintendent of Police Vinod Kumar Choubey, the highest ranked officer killed in the more than twenty years of violence in the state. Over the past few months, India has witnessed a sharp increase in the number and severity of Maoist attacks, with the state of West Bengal having been especially hard hit. These repeated attacks are leading political opponents and observers to question the ability of state governments to competently tackle this challenge. End Summary.

12. (U) According to Deputy Inspector General of Police Pavan Deo, the police official in charge of the state's anti-Naxalite (Maoist) operations, the attacks began when two Chhattisgarh Special Armed Forces (SAF) personnel were gunned down outside their rural police training camp near the village of Madanwada. Upon hearing word of the attack, the district's Superintendent of Police, Vinod Kumar Choubey, accompanied reinforcements to investigate the incident. He and his men were hit by a succession of landmine explosions when they arrived at the scene, and were subsequently ambushed by nearly two hundred well-armed insurgents. Twenty three security personnel were killed in the ensuing fighting; an additional five who had been dispatched earlier were later killed while trying to enter the area through an alternative road. In all, at least 30 policemen have been confirmed dead and more than ten have been hospitalized. There is speculation that an additional thirteen policemen are still unaccounted for, but police officials have refused to confirm or deny the reports until rescue operations are completed. The Central Reserve Police Force - a national police force sent to Chhattisgarh specifically to combat the Naxalite threat - has ordered six hundred of its security forces, equipped with mine detection kits and rescue equipment, to secure the area and pursue the assailants.

13. (U) According to security experts, the Maoist insurgency, which grew out of a rural uprising in West Bengal in 1967, has spread to more than half of India's 28 states. These rebels,

known as "Naxalites," operate across the "red corridor" stretching from the Nepal border to West Bengal, and through central India into the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. The Government of India (GOI) estimates that there are up to 20,000 insurgents operating nationwide, in more than 180 of the country's 611 districts. Chhattisgarh has been one of the strongholds of the Maoist insurgency in the last two decades, and this year has been a particularly bloody one in the state. According to new sources, this week's attack brings the total number of Maoist-inflicted deaths to over 150 in Chhattisgarh alone since January. In June, eleven police officers were killed in a similar attack in the Bastar region, and in April, Naxalite forces planted a landmine near a polling station for the national elections, killing five. In neighboring Maharashtra, the increase in violence has been drastic. There has been 54 Naxal-related deaths this year, compared to fourteen in 2008. The most brazen attack of the year came on May 22, when sixteen police officers, including five policewomen were killed. As in Chhattisgarh the Naxalites ambushed a police caravan that had been lured into the jungle to remove trees blocking a major road.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: While the Indian security forces are mindful of the threat presented by the Naxalite forces, this type of ambush style attacks seems to be on the rise. Security officials and political leaders in Chhattisgarh claim to be changing tactics - including the use of police trained at the state's counterinsurgency and jungle warfare school, but such new tactics have yet to appear. The state governments of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh recently held a strategy session to better coordinate a response to the Naxalites, but insurgents are able to move relatively freely throughout the sparsely populated - and sparsely governed - hill

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and forest regions that border these states, eluding such efforts. The Maoists have repeatedly been able to ambush large police forces, using the same tactics, provoking finger pointing and accusations that the police - and the state governments that direct them - are incompetent and ill-prepared to face this challenge. End Comment.
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